



The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2011 (VAWA)

Background Information

First enacted in 1994, VAWA includes several provisions that protect battered immigrants whose noncitizen status can make them particularly vulnerable to crimes of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking. The abusers of undocumented immigrants often exploit the victims' immigration status, leaving the victim afraid to seek services or report the abuse to law enforcement and making them fearful of assisting with the investigation and prosecution of these crimes. Through the VAWA self-petition, T visas, and U visas, VAWA enhances the safety of victims and their children and provides an important tool for law enforcement to investigate and prosecute crimes.

The current VAWA reauthorization bill, S. 1925, was introduced by Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and has an additional 61 co-sponsors (as of March 22) of which 8 are Republicans and 53 are Democrats. In February, the Senate Judiciary Committee passed the bill and soon the full Senate will vote on it. The House does not yet have a bill.

What to Tell Your Congress Member:

- The Senate VAWA bill includes modest yet important changes to existing immigration protections including VAWA self-petitioning, T and U visas, and the regulation of international marriage brokers. These protections ensure the safety of victims of horrific acts of violence and predatory behavior. VAWA also adopts national standards to protect immigration detainees from rape and sexual assault.
- VAWA is a rare bi-partisan success story. At a time when almost nothing can pass Congress, VAWA demonstrates that there is broad support for protecting women and victims of violence.
- VAWA shows that there is broad bi-partisan support for immigration reform proposals.
- Keep VAWA focused on protecting victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking. In the Judiciary Committee, Senator Grassley won inclusion of an amendment that would make it an aggravated felony upon a third drunk driving conviction. If this provision stays in the bill it will be the first time since VAWA was enacted that VAWA includes provisions not germane to its purpose of protecting victims of violence.

